

McNeil River State Game Refuge and State Game Sanctuary Management Plan Revision

Summary of Public Scoping Meetings

Public scoping meetings were held in Homer on April 24, 2006 and in Anchorage April 25, 2006. About 45 community members, 7 ADF&G staff and two contract facilitators attended the Homer meeting. About 20 community members, 11 ADF&G staff, two contractors and one DNR staff member attended the Anchorage meeting. The meetings were designed both to inform the public about the reasons and process for revising the management plan and to generate specific suggestions for clarifying and improving management policies for the Sanctuary and Refuge.

Meeting Design The introduction to each meeting included a short PowerPoint presentation about the history and geography of the Sanctuary and Refuge area and an overview of ADF&G's Special Area Program and the management plan revision process. In response to feedback in Homer, the Anchorage meeting included an additional staff presentation on problems with the current plan which could be summed up as: in places it lacks clear guidance to those charged with reviewing permit applications and managing the resource.

Following the introduction, Homer participants split into four groups based on area of interest. Each group was assigned a facilitator/recorder and an ADF&G staff person. Three groups corresponded to aspects of the management plan, namely access, non-commercial use (camping and recreation), and commercial use (structures and facilities). A fourth group, designated "other," was for discussion of topics not fitting into the previous categories, overarching issues, and concerns beyond the scope of the management plan. Participants were free to roam between groups. Because of the smaller number of participants in Anchorage, facilitators decided to conduct the meeting in a single group.

In Homer, participants reconvened for the last half hour of the meeting to hear summaries from the small groups and give feedback on the meeting. In Anchorage, participants were invited to give closing comments followed by group feedback on the meeting. All participants were given a questionnaire and encouraged to provide more detailed comments in writing.

Public Comments The remainder of this summary contains the comments, questions, ideas and sometimes-strong opinions voiced by participants and captured by the recorders. In preparing this document, the recorders have lightly edited to improve clarity and grouped related comments. Otherwise, the notes are the same as those taken at the meetings.

**MCNEIL RIVER REFUGE/SANCTUARY
PUBLIC MEETING
Homer, Monday, April 24, 2006
Summary of Comments**

ACCESS SUBGROUP

Modes of Access

- Modes of access include:
 - Floatplane and boat
 - Helicopter -limited in sanctuary (access permit)
 - Jet ski -prefer not to allow
 - Airboat -prefer not to allow
 - Jet boats
 - Hydrofoils
- Maybe the department could approve certain operators for helicopter landings at designated sites.
- There is a possible regulation requiring a specific permit for airboat use or helicopter landings.
- Aircraft landings in the refuge are currently done without a Special Area Permit.

Access Points

- No new access points should be developed.
- No more developed access points.
- No developed airstrips.
- No docks.
- In McNeil Cove, only one aircraft access point is physically possible is near the current camp. No additional place exists.
- An airstrip exists near Section 32, specific location not known (possibly out of the refuge).
- Participants do not want a dock. The tide range is too much.

- Floatplane access was possible at certain tides during construction of the Paint River ladder.

ACCESS (cont.)

- Don't put a dock or float in the mouth of Paint River or a dock at Chenik Lake.
- There is a place to land (not an air strip) at Chenik Point for wheeled small planes.

Camps

- Limit the number of new camps at existing Refuge access points.
- Participant is leary of creating additional camps due to not enough staffing by ADF&G.

Trails

- The sanctuary's developed trail is adequate.
- If use increases at Chenik maybe there should be a trail, but the river is hard to cross.
- Don't allow 4-wheelers.
- No more hardened trails in the sanctuary.
- In the refuge, especially at Chenik, a hardened trail from Chenik Lake to the falls might be practical. (A motorcycle was used for a period of time between Chenik Lake and the beach when the land was BLM land. Currently motorcycles and ORV's need a Special Area Permit, and are unlikely to get one.)
- ORV's might be okay depending on the activity, e.g., a snow machine or 3-wheeler for geology study in winter might be a legitimate activity.
- The rustic Chenik trail is a bear trail, an "ankle-breaker." It used to be a tractor trail and was used by miners for access to the mineral claim.
- Mountain bikes should not be allowed. (Mountain bikes currently require a Special Area Permit.)

Questions from Participants

- What areas are permitted landing sites for fixed wing/helicopter?
- Is the current strip on beach at Amakdedori Creek (outside of Refuge) used in hunting season? Are there bear and/or moose in the adjacent area?
- Is Chenik an access point for hunting on adjacent land?

- How much moose hunting occurs in the refuge? (Staff present did not know.)

ACCESS (cont.)

Other Topics

- Convert SUA and refuge to sanctuary so the entire area is closed to bear hunting.
- Enlarge the refuge to include lands in the original refuge proposal, which extended to Contact Point.
- There is a lack of ADF&G and law enforcement presence in the refuge. The primary law enforcement responsibility is with the troopers and they are experiencing cutbacks.
- The refuge is a buffer for the sanctuary. The sanctuary is unique. The number of bears is unique.
- Summary: Access is adequate. Hardened trail would be okay to protect habitat.

RECREATION/NON-COMMERCIAL SUBGROUP

Note: Comments refer to Chenik Creek/Lake area of the refuge unless otherwise noted.

- People should be aware of appropriate places to camp, e.g., designated distance from mouth of Chenik Creek and in the area near Chenik Lake.
- People should be made aware of how to move through area. (The trail from Chenik Lake down the creek to the mouth could be cleared a bit and marked for people who aren't aware.)
- A 14-day camping limit is expensive for users. May want to establish a limited number of campsites. (Users must move their camps 2 miles if staying more than 14 days, which means they have to pay an air taxi to move them.)
- Need to get ahead of demand and regulate amount of use before it is established. Determine what is sustainable to maintain. (Maintain) quality of experience.
- Bear hunting, trapping and fishing are not compatible with people viewing bears. Need to set priorities. (Viewing should be the priority)

RECREATION/NON-COMMERCIAL SUBGROUP (cont.)

- People should be instructed on how to view so they do not push bears toward other viewers on opposite sides of a stream. (Designate one side of creek for viewing.) Brochure (on best practices for bear viewing and area specifics) would help for Air taxi use.
- Put more responsibility on commercial operators to distribute info (that ADF&G would provide)
- People should act in predictable ways in specific use areas.
- Safe anchorage could increase demand and be a problem. (After discussion most agreed there is not much in the way of safe anchorage in the refuge)
- Low intensity? Limiting use raises allocation conflict(s). Consider that up front.
- ADF&G should provide food storage locker at Chenik.
- Require electric fence and bear proof containers (for all users).
- Establish permit for individual overnight use.
- Permit by designated zones in refuge, even without limits for now.
- Permit would help get idea of number of hunters if it is opened.
- Have same system for all users who stay overnight.
- Have permit for everyone including day use.
- Look at revising statutes to give ADF&G more land management authority.
- Have system to fill slots everyday on sanctuary. Sell the no-shows.
- Clean up Chenik camp.

COMMERCIAL

- Bear viewing permit rules seem to have changed midstream, 2004-2005, e.g. 14-day limit in one location
- The rules should be the same for all users. Create a level playing field between fishing and bear viewing operators, e.g. require bear safety training, specific trails.
- Doesn't moving camps every 14 days increase disturbance? 30 days might be better for habitat.
- Moving 2 miles is expensive and raises safety concerns, e.g. in case of emergency evacuation.
- Chenik Lake is self-limiting in terms of number of visitors, unlike Wolverine Creek.
- Some locations should be off limits to camping, e.g. $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 mi. of McNeil River Falls.
- Most of the operators work out use of good camping spots amongst themselves.
- Would like to use tidal area of Kamishak SUA
- Provide outhouses and food storage at Chenik Lake – permanent structures maintained by the state for public use.
- Do not allow permanent commercial facilities.
- “Temporary structure” should mean everything comes out at the end of season or permit. Materials and types of structures not important, as long as the structures are temporary.
- If limits are placed on the number and size of commercial camps, they should be determined based on scientific research on how bears are impacted.
- All camps in the sanctuary and refuge should be required to follow proper procedures for securing food and keeping a clean camp. Temporary (commercial) camps should be required to have electric fencing.
- Keep commercial fishing boat access in tidal area.
- Commercial fish managers and fishers should be partners in developing this management plan. More cooperation and co-management of resources are needed because bears rely on fish for food

COMMERCIAL (cont.)

- Fish and bears need to be managed for all user groups.
- Elements of a “high quality environment” for bear viewing: all ages of bears at site; presence of individual bears with known history; specified areas for trails, viewing, and camping.

OTHER

- Manage fish and bears for all user groups sustainably.
- Manage resource in a way that does not interfere with natural cycles.
- Manage consumptive (e.g., hunting, fishing) and non-consumptive (e.g., bear viewing) uses for wildlife sustainability.
- Manage bear populations and age distribution.
- Separate management areas for different uses.
- Continue to manage for low intensity.
- Keep sanctuary visitor access as is generally. Keep refuge opportunities limited.
- Define “low intensity” by past practices.
- Manage bear viewing and hunting for west side of Cook Inlet as a whole – interagency effort.
- Coordinate management among different land users and landowners.
- Continue to manage sanctuary and refuge as wilderness experiences. Allow higher traffic at other places like Brooks. Allow refuge to serve as a “buffer” between sanctuary and preserve.
- Use “leave no trace.”
- Encourage good backcountry practices, e.g. fire rules.
- Refuge should be an extension of the sanctuary with less strict regulations but still low impact. Possibly higher traffic.

OTHER (cont.)

- Designated campsites should be provided. They would be safer, reduce possibility of food conditioning, and wouldn't reduce value of refuge.
- Some campsites should have electric fencing.
- Reserved use and traffic control are okay.
- Provide designated campsites for the backcountry users in the refuge, i.e., cold camping with stoves.
- Require permits for camping.
- No brown bear hunting.
- Lack of representation for non-consumptive users at Board of Game is a problem.
- Ideally, the refuge, Kamishak SUA and surrounding state lands would be labeled "sanctuary."

FEEDBACK ON THE MEETING

- Stay in one group to allow participants to see the big picture.
- More information from ADF&G. What are the issues?
- Check information in history presentation. When did McNeil close to hunting?
- Create opportunities to talk about new places for bear viewing because demand is growing.
- Create opportunities to talk about hunting, fishing, Kamishak access, and special permits.
- Decision makers should consider the economic value of bear viewing in the process.
- Bear viewers want to be heard by the Governor!
- The Board of Game process is corrupt!
- Chenik Camp needs to be cleaned up!

MCNEIL RIVER REFUGE/SANCTUARY PUBLIC MEETING

Homer, Monday, April 24, 2006

Attendees

Name	Organization	Mailing Address
Bachrach, Dave	Alaska Adventures	PO Box 2828 Homer, AK 99603
Bailey, E.P.	None	PO Box 2994 Homer, AK 99603
Chorman, Dale		39960 Highview Ct Homer, AK 99603
Day, Chris and Ken	Emerald Air Service	PO Box 635 Homer, AK 99603
DeCreeft, Barbara	Kachemak Bay Flying Service	PO Box 1769 Homer, AK 99603
deCreeft, Bill	Kachemak Bay Flying Service	PO Box 1769 Homer, AK 99603
Ditwiler, Lou	Kiana B&B	58856 East End Road Homer, AK 99603
Faulkner, Donna Rae	The Surf Shack Nexus	811 Ocean Drive Loop Homer, AK 99603
Faust, Nina		PO Box 2994 Homer, AK 99603
Feipster, Craig		135 W. Bunnell Ave Homer, AK 99603
Fresche, Mary Collopy, Tom	Wild North Photography	PO Box 845 Homer, AK 99603
Haggerty, Mako		PO Box 2001 Homer, AK 99603
Hawfield, Michael	Friends of McNeil	PO Box 2609 Homer, AK 99603
Hayberg, Thomas	South Peninsula Sportsman Association	PO Box 175 Anchor Point, AK 99556
Hiehland, Roberta		PO Box 2460 Homer, AK 99603
Hlebechuk, Clint Hlebechuk, Simyra Luke, Meghan	Hallo Bay	PO Box 2904 Homer, AK 99603
Johnson, Ann LaRee	None	PO Box 784 Homer, AK 99603

Name	Organization	Mailing Address
Linehan, Patricia		PO Box 341 Homer, AK 99603
Lyon, Dave	Backcountry Hunters & Anglers	Box 47 Homer AK 99603
Matz, George		PO Box 15182 Fritz Creek, AK 99603
McBride, Michael	Kachemak Bay Wilderness Lodge	PO Box 956 Homer, AK 99603
Mogle, Bob		1240 Melody Rose Ln Homer, AK 99603
Nakada, Deborah		PO Box 3001 Homer, AK 99603
Nelson, Jessie		PO Box 130 Homer, AK 99603
Otis, Ted	ADF&G	3298 Douglas Place Homer, AK 99603
Ottog..., Troy		General Delivery Kodiak, AK
Raskin, David and Marga	Friends of Alaska National Wildlife Refuges	59975 Eider Avenue Homer, AK 99603
Rogers, John	Kaami Coastal	PO Box 1503 Homer, AK 99603
Seekins, Dale		1009 Mission Road Homer, Alaska 99603
Sigman, Marilyn	Center for Alaska Coastal Studies	PO Box 2225 Homer, AK 99603
Sowls, Art		PO Box 1693 Homer, AK 99603
Spence, Diane		39960 Highview Court Homer, AK 99603
Stonorov, Derek	Alaska Bear Quest	PO Box 15005 Fritz Creek, AK 99603
Wasserman, Elizabeth	Lake Clark National Park and Preserve	2187 Kachemak Drive Homer, AK 99603

**MCNEIL RIVER REFUGE/SANCTUARY
PUBLIC MEETING
Anchorage, Tuesday, April 25, 2006
Summary of Comments**

ACCESS

- No additional modes of access into refuge, especially float plane traffic.
- No port developments
- No new airstrips or helicopter access
- Trails may need more thought.
- People should know that a planned road corridor exists between Chenik Head and King Salmon. DNR and DOT are involved in possible road development.
- Continue to protect what is unique about McNeil
- Create 2-3 mi. wide buffer zone in refuge with greater control next to sanctuary
- Work hard to offer alternatives to building infrastructure like ports in the area that would become an invitation to more access and growth pressure.
- Make it easier for bear viewers to get into the refuge, to take pressure off the sanctuary. But do it based on research and with great care to avoid negative impacts
- Increase number of visitors allowed into the refuge.

COMMERCIAL

- Place best bear-viewing practices on both commercial and non-commercial users.
- Encourage guided bear viewing to the exclusion of people wandering in the refuge.
- If commercial activity has negative impact on bears, permits should be revocable.
- Charge fees for refuge permits.
- Require commercial users to post a bond and inspect to ensure clean-up, etc..

COMMERCIAL (cont.)

- Make refuge interaction consistent with maintaining sanctuary-level habituation.

RECREATION/NON-COMMERCIAL

- Require a permit for refuge use.
- Make refuge interaction consistent with maintaining sanctuary-level habituation.
- Identify best potential viewing areas in the refuge.
- Replicate sanctuary-style viewing opportunities in the refuge, e.g. with interpretive guiding, safety training, etc.
- Provide for unguided bear viewing away from the crowd.
- If allowing visitors into refuge, have methods to avoid shooting bear. Training?
- Consider designated camping area with cooking facility and bear proof food locker.
- No hard sites. Keep camping “primitive.”
- No wooden pads. Gravel pads at a designated site would be better.
- Designate sites for camping after studying appropriateness. Allow tent camping only with food storage at every designated site.
- No Weather Ports, giant tents, or wall tents. Outhouses okay. Match Sanctuary standard.
- Bear hunting is incompatible with the purpose of the refuge.
- Make it easier for bear viewers to get into the refuge, to take pressure off the sanctuary. But do it based on research and with great care to avoid negative impacts
- Increase number of visitors allowed into the refuge.

OTHER

- Manage sanctuary and refuge to protect bears down to the individual level.
- Convert refuge to sanctuary through legislature.
- “Habituation” is, by definition, “non-reaction to benign interaction.” Neutrality is implicit, so no need for the term “neutral habituation.”
- ADF&G should have flexibility to restrict human use in the event of unusual factors, such as a bad berry crop.
- Expand research to understand population decline.
- Make protecting bears the primary purpose of the refuge consistent with the sanctuary. (This applies to commercial and non-commercial uses.)
- Include in management plan, a mechanism for getting heard at the Board of Game.
- Review utility and bear impact of Paint River ladder and consider removing.
- Management plan should discuss managing bears as individuals as well as a population.
- Such management of individuals is practiced in Kenyan game preserves.
- The plan revision process should not turn into a “hunting vs. non-hunting” issue.
- McNeil is special, and hunting can occur with Alaska’s other 40,000 bears. Moose hunting may be compatible, but not bear hunting, in the refuge.
- Information from British Columbia suggests that bear viewing can be more lucrative for guides than bear hunting.

FEEDBACK ON THE MEETING

- Format worked well. Everyone got to voice opinions.
- An improvement would be going through all the questions on the written comment sheet.

**MCNEIL RIVER REFUGE/SANCTUARY
PUBLIC MEETING
Anchorage, Tuesday, April 25, 2006
Attendees**

Name	Organization	Mailing Address
Adams, Mike	Friends of McNeil	PO Box 672009 Chugiak, AK 99567
Galt, Joan		6730 Lunar Dr. Anchorage, AK 99504
Hodson, Loyd & Loretta	Self	3811 Crosson Circle Anchorage, AK 99517
Joslin, Paul	Friends of McNeil	PO Box 202671 Anchorage, AK 99520
LeFebvre, Dick Levensaler, Martha	Selves	1921 Sunrise Dr. Anchorage, AK 99508
Matt, Colleen		16440 St. James Circle Anchorage, AK 99516
Miller, Mark Or Peck, Ron	Alaska Travel Industry Assoc. ATIA	2600 Cordova St Anchorage, AK 99503
Newman, Mark		PO Box 112528 Anchorage, AK 99511
Rowland, Gene	Recon, LLC	481 W. Arctic Avenue Palmer, AK 99645
Sherwonit, Bill		7601 Soldotna Dr. Anchorage, AK 99507
Siciliano, Robert	Self	PO Box 244881 Anchorage, AK 99524
Simpson, Sherry		PO Box 211932 Anchorage, AK 99521
Theuer, William	Self	4321 Garrett Circle Anchorage, AK 99504
Watkins, Bill		PO Box 147 Denali Park, AK 99755
Williams, Rosanne		320 W. 12 th Ave Anchorage, AK 99515-3361